

# 'Swim for Health:' Programme Evaluation of a Multi-partner Aquatic Exercise Intervention in the North of England: Interim Findings.

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## BACKGROUND & RATIONALE

- Regular aquatic activity offers significant potential to reduce the prevalence of obesity (Shea 1986, Mazzeo and Tanaka 2001). It is a non-weight bearing activity, caters for a wide variety of groups and it is affordable and widely available.
- The UK Amateur Swimming Association has developed several regional health interventions in response to contemporary health problems, including the rising levels of obesity.
- 'Swim for Health' is one such regional multi-partner intervention. It aims to decrease health inequalities among pre-school children and their families, local employers, people with a range of health needs, including obesity, and people aged over 50 years.

### AIM

- The principal aim of this study was to evaluate the success of the 'Swim for Health' initiative in achieving its stated goals.

### METHODOLOGY

- Several performance indicators were assessed:
  - Attendance Figures: How many people received Swim for Health services and were the services sustainable?
  - Programme Evaluation – How efficient and appropriate was the Swim for Health Programme
  - Provision Indicators – Did target groups receive the Services?
  - Access and Facilities – Were services appropriate for target groups?
- Programme evaluation using the theory driven model outlined by Rossi et al (1998) was applied using a triangulation of qualitative and quantitative methods.
- 82 semi-structured individual interviews were completed with organisers, participants and non-participants. 269 questionnaires augmented interview data.

## RESULTS & DISCUSSION

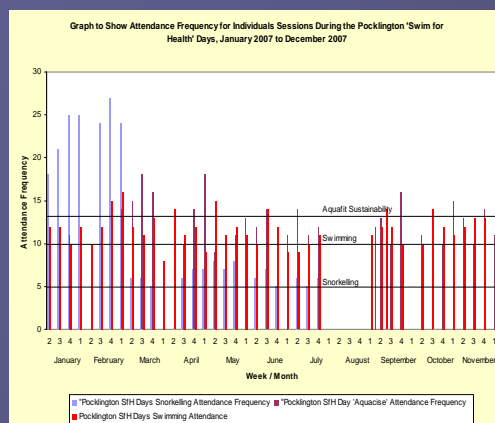


Figure 1: Example attendance record for three sessions in the Swim for Health intervention, including sustainability targets.

- Attendance Figures: Attendance figures were logged and sustainability assessed for each session provided by 'Swim for Health.' Figure 1 offers an example of these figures. Participation rates at new sessions typically took a number of weeks to reach sustainable levels.

- 59% of sessions were financially self sustaining after two years of the intervention. However, 13.6% of sessions were discontinued due to unforeseen difficulties.

- Programme Evaluation: Swim for Health' has built partnerships providing aquatic activity for those with a range of health needs. However, partnerships with employers were difficult to achieve due to apathy among them.



- Provision Indicators: A high proportion of 'Swim for Health' participants stated that they did not take part in physical activity elsewhere. Self-reported physical activity levels were also higher in participants in aquatic sessions than those who were not participating in any aquatic sessions.

- Therefore, 'Swim for Health' increased aquatic participation in specific target groups, suggesting target populations utilised services as intended.

- However, 82.3% of participants were female, while 94.1% of participants were British. This suggests that not all target populations participated.

- Typically, 'Swim for Health' participants were elderly women or young mothers. Many of the individuals were overweight or obese and had low swimming ability. These individuals did not feel able to participate in swimming classes open to the general public.

- Access and Facilities: There was difficulty in offering sessions other than aqua aerobics due to a lack of qualified staff. Aqua Aerobics was seen as an activity with feminine connotations. Consequently few men participated.



Figure 2: Swim for Health intervention Launch

## CONCLUSION

- 'Swim for Health has progressed as expected with 75% of the target groups. Work with people with a range of health needs has exceeded targets. However, work with Local Employers has proved ineffective to date.

- A number of weaknesses must be addressed by 'Swim for Health,' particularly a failure to engage with male participants, people aged between 40 and 50 years, and ethnic minorities.

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## REFERENCES

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